



Health Care for the Homeless Network (HCHN) Public Health—Seattle & King County

Homeless Health News

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NEW: Sign up for free Public Health—Seattle & King County e-mail alerts on pandemic flu, from Health Care for the Homeless, and more! Details at: www.metrokc.gov/health/about/subscriptions.htm

For more information about Pandemic Flu:

Public Health—Seattle & King County:
<http://www.metrokc.gov/health/pandemicflu/>

WA State Dept of Health
<http://www.doh.wa.gov/panflu/>

US Official Pandemic Flu Site
www.pandemicflu.gov

Pandemic Flu Update: What You Need to Know

How does a pandemic start? A pandemic is a disease outbreak that spreads rapidly around the world. A new strain of flu has been found in some birds in Asia and other countries. Some people have become sick from having contact with infected birds, and some of these people have died. If this new “bird flu” strain begins spreading from humans to other humans, a pandemic may occur.

Is it serious? Pandemic flu is very serious because it is a new form of flu. Humans have no natural resistance or immunity to it.

- There is no vaccine for pandemic flu. Regular flu vaccine does not work against it. It will take several months to develop a vaccine for the new pandemic flu after it strikes.
- Anyone infected with flu may be contagious for 24 hours before they have symptoms and 7 days after.
- The virus can spread easily to large numbers of people and cause many deaths.
- Hospitals and clinics will be overwhelmed, and may be short-staffed.

When will it happen?

There is no way to predict this. However, since a new strain of flu definitely exists, scientists are monitoring the situation closely.

What you can do now Prevent the spread of germs.

- Wash hands often or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer.



- Provide hand sanitizer at key locations in your agency (entry, phones, computers, etc.).
- Cover your cough. Use your inner elbow or use a tissue (& throw it away).
- Avoid touching your face, nose, eyes, and mouth.
- Learn basic care-giving for people with a fever, body aches, and lung congestion.

Start Planning. A good place for all of us to start is with personal preparedness. We in HCHN like the easy-to-understand guide from the Washington State Dept of Health, “*Preparing for Pandemic Influenza: A personal*

and family guide.” Visit: <http://www.doh.wa.gov/panflu/>

Homeless-serving agencies clearly have complex planning issues, because so many people are grouped together and many have special needs. Public Health is working on special guidance to help homeless agencies (see VPAT, page 3).

Read up on pandemic flu preparedness. Many excellent resources already exist to get you started.

NEW! You can now subscribe to “e-mail alerts” for various Public Health—Seattle & King County websites and be automatically notified when new information is posted. **Sign up for pandemic flu and HCHN alerts today!** For HCHN, either go to our website or to the subscriptions page (see box at left). HCHN is under the “Personal Health” section.





For more information about identifying cold and flu symptoms visit:

- <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/qa/coldflu.htm>
- <http://www.fda.gov/fdac/features/896flcht.html>

Imagine 10% of your employees are too sick to come to work.

Imagine one quarter of your workforce could be out for 3-4 months.

Imagine the other agencies you rely on are facing the same situation.

For more pandemic flu workplace preparedness information visit:

- www.metrokc.gov/health/pandemicflu/businesses/index.htm

Is it the Flu? Checking Your Symptoms

What is the difference between a cold and the flu? The flu and the common cold are both respiratory illnesses but they are caused by different viruses. In general, the flu is worse than the common cold, but because these two types of illnesses have similar flu-like symptoms, it can be difficult to tell the difference between them based

on symptoms alone.

Colds (5-10 days)

- Top symptoms: sniffles, sneezing, sore throat, stuffed up or runny nose, cough
- Symptoms appear gradually.
- Symptoms are annoying but tolerable.
- The person can usually go about daily business (*but they should*

rest if possible, and try to prevent exposing others).

The Flu

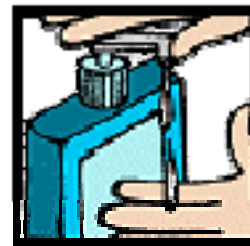
- Top symptoms: **fever**, headache, body aches, sore throat, dry cough, extreme tiredness.
- The flu comes on suddenly.
- Symptoms are more severe than a cold.

Workplace Planning: How Will Pandemic Flu Affect Your Agency?

Based on previous pandemic flu outbreaks, health officials project that when a new pandemic hits, there could be cumulative absentee rates of 25-30% over 3-4 months. Absentees will include sick employees and those who must care for others who are sick. Fear will also impact absenteeism rates.

Begin thinking now in order to help prepare your agency to maintain continuity of essential services during a pandemic flu outbreak:

- Have extra supplies on hand (food, water, tissues, masks, gloves, trash bags, etc.)
- Build in redundancy for the core functions of your agency by training multiple staff to cover these tasks.
- If you serve clients in a congregate setting, start thinking about possible isolation areas at your site. What are your options for quickly separating sick people from healthy people? Rooms that have one use today might need to serve other purposes during a pandemic.
- Talk with partner agencies and volunteers you rely on.
- Create plans to enable employees to work from home or other isolated sites when possible.
- Update sick and medical leave policies. Communicate with employees about the importance of staying away from work when sick. Concern about lost wages is the largest deterrent to self-quarantine.
- Address staff health & safety concerns. Prior to a pandemic flu situation, have policies and gear in place to help protect their health.
- Encourage staff to have a personal/family plan in place. Guides available at www.doh.wa.gov/panflu
- Ensure existing emergency plans are applicable to a pandemic flu outbreak. (What? No emergency plan? No time like the present.)
- Evaluate whether core activities could be sustained during a prolonged outbreak with limited staff.
- Plan for disruptions to essential government services (e.g. water, power)



INCLUDED.
CONNECTED.
PREPARED.

“Vulnerable Populations Action Team” Forms

Public Health—Seattle & King County has formed a “Vulnerable Populations Action Team” (VPAT).

The purpose of VPAT is to assure that pandemic flu planning takes into account the needs of King County’s most vulnerable and hard-to-reach residents. These are people who would need extra support prior to and throughout a pandemic.

Examples of vulnerable populations include people

with disabilities, people with limited English, medically compromised people, seniors, children, impoverished people, and people experiencing homelessness (among others).

Using lessons learned from events such as Katrina and the SARS outbreak, VPAT is in the process of organizing its efforts and will be working closely with community-based agencies and networks.

VPAT is now starting to develop guidance tailored to homeless serving agencies given the special issues you and your clients face. We’re gathering initial input via those who attend our TB & Homelessness Coalition.

Call Health Care for the Homeless Network at (206) 296-5091 for more information.

Resources to Help Your Clients Quit or Reduce Tobacco Use

Last fall, the people of Washington State voted to expand the Clean Indoor Air Act, making all public places and workplaces smoke free.

Programs that work with homeless people may have questions about the new law, or may want to learn about resources available to help people quit.

We all know that people experiencing homelessness are working through challenging issues in their lives, and are typically under a lot of stress. Quitting smoking might not be their top priority today—but it might be, and could be, tomorrow.

We shouldn’t ignore smoking in homeless people, just as we don’t ignore other addictions that seri-

ously impact their health. In fact, past HCHN surveys show that many homeless people *do* have a desire to quit.

Did you know the tobacco industry has actually targeted homeless service organizations and their clientele? [“Marketing to the marginalized: tobacco industry targeting of the homeless and mentally ill. *Tobacco Control* 2005; 14 (409-415).]

Public Health’s Tobacco Prevention program and Health Care for the Homeless Network can help.

We can brainstorm with you on ways to begin incorporating tobacco-related programming into your other health education efforts. We can offer training for your staff on

how to do brief interventions. We can share information about resources like nicotine replacement therapy, both for your staff and for your clients. And we’d love to hear from you about strategies that are working in your agency. Call either Tobacco Prevention at (206) 296-7613 or Health Care for the Homeless Network at (206) 296-5091.

*HCHN is happy to announce that **Jennifer Fillion** will be helping homeless service and supportive housing agencies link to tobacco cessation resources. Jenny has prior experience working in local homeless services, and she understands many of the realities out there.*



NEW Health Education Posters and Brochures Online

Health Care for the Homeless Network has recently produced a new series of English and Spanish health education posters and brochures.

These materials are intended to serve a wide audience and can be distributed to clients as well as

staff at homeless service agencies.

Topics covered include:

- Should I get a Flu Shot?
- Cold and Flu Season
- Heat Emergencies
- Tick Talk
- Preventing & Curing Lice
- Spider Bites

- West Nile Virus

All posters and brochures are available free of charge and can be downloaded from the HCHN website.

<http://www.metrokc.gov/health/hchn/brochures.htm>



Stop the Spread of Germs: Gear Up!

Hand Sanitizer & Dispensers. *Wash your hands often* to help prevent the spread of germs, colds, and flu. When soap and water aren't available, use alcohol-based hand sanitizer gel.

Stop germs at the door by mounting a large wall dispenser at the entrance.

Keep a bottle near computer keyboards and phones.

Hand sanitizer dispensers and refills can be purchased from many office, janitorial, and medical suppliers.

Masks & tissues for covering coughs. Providing coughing clients, tenants, and staff with paper masks (either the blue surgical style masks or the flat pleated) that cover the mouth and nose is an effective strategy for helping to control the spread of colds, flu, and TB.

Each facility should have a stock of surgical masks and work to create a culture that encourages coughing staff and clients to use them. Masks can be purchased through medical supply catalogues and generally cost 10-50 cents per mask.

Also good to have on hand:

- Digital (with probe covers) or disposable thermometers.
- Boxes of disposable gloves.
- Extra food and water.
- Large garbage bags.
- First aid supplies.



No storage space? What about a partner agency, or a faith organization you are involved with? Could they store supplies on your behalf?

If your organization needs advice on gearing up, contact HCHN at (206) 296-5091. Ask for Heather Barr or Marcia Stone.

Health Care for the Homeless Network (HCHN)
Public Health—Seattle & King County
 999 Third Avenue, Suite 900
 Seattle WA, 98104 Phone: (206) 296-5091

Health Care for the Homeless Network is a community project of Public Health—Seattle & King County. Health Care for the Homeless Network sends out periodic health news updates to the community with health tips for staff and volunteers who work in shelters, day centers, hygiene programs, feeding programs, and housing programs. Do you have questions for us? Topics you would like to see us address? Email us at hchn@metrokc.gov

If you would like to be removed from the mailing list for this newsletter please email us at hchn@metrokc.gov

Website: www.metrokc.gov/health/hchn